

# Delta Scene

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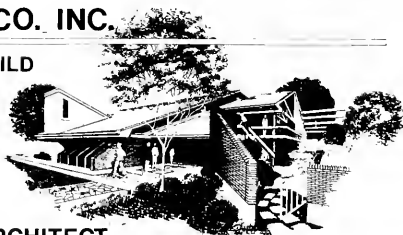
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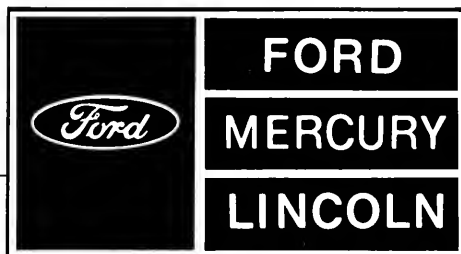
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**Cover Photo:** Malmaison, home of Greenwood Leflore, the last great chief of the Choctaw nation. Malmaison, located near Greenwood, Ms. was completely destroyed by fire in 1942. Photo courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

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# Spring Events




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## MARCH

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### March 15 - June 15

"The Language of Choctaw Crafts" exhibits at the State Historical Museum in Jackson, MS. Free.

### March 17 - 22

NJCAA Women's Basketball National Championship Tournament, Howard Coliseum, Northwest Mississippi Junior College, Senatobia, MS. For ticket information call 562-5262, ext. 223 or 225.

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## APRIL

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Oil and Water Colors, exhibited by Nan Sanders, Bolivar County Library, 104 S. Leflore Ave., Cleveland, MS.

### April 1 - 21

Robinson the Cat Exhibit, featuring Walter Anderson's colorful wood-block prints, Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena, MS.

### April 4, 5, 11, & 12

Vicksburg Little Theatre presents "Old-Tyme Melodrama", 3101 Confederate Ave., Vicksburg, MS. Call 636-0471.

### April 5

Catfish Festival, all day celebration with 10-K races, coronation of Catfish Queen, entertainment, catfish eating contest, arts and crafts, children's theatre and catfish dinner. Courthouse Lawn and surrounding area, Belzoni, MS, 247-2915 or 247-2616.

### April 8

University Chamber Ensemble, Chamber Recital, Broom Auditorium, 8 p.m., Delta State University, Cleveland, MS.

### April 11 & 12

Music Theatre Workshop Performance, Broom Auditorium, 8 p.m., Delta State University, Cleveland, MS.

### April 13

Special Event: Symphony in the West Gallery, Jackson Symphony Orchestra String Quartet, Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS.

### April 20

Suzuki Concert, Delta Room, Ewing Building, Delta State University, Cleveland, MS.

Eudora Welty Stories, Featuring Welty scholar in residence from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Washington County Library, 359-1424, Greenville, MS.

### April 21

Eudora Welty Stories, Featuring a Welty Scholar in residence from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Bolivar County Library, 359-1424, Cleveland, MS.

### April 22

Eudora Welty Stories, Featuring a Welty scholar in residence from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Carnegie Public Library, Clarksdale, MS.

### April 30 - May 1

Mississippi Museum of Art Spring Symposium, "The Arts of the South... Old Perceptions and New Viewpoints", Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS.

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## MAY

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### May - June

Cottonlandia Collection Competition. This will hang in the Civic Center on the 9th of May and the following week will be moved to Cottonlandia, Greenwood, MS.

Oil Paintings & Water Colors exhibited by Polly Cooper, Bolivar County Library, Cleveland, MS.

### May 3

Arts & Craft Show; Florewood River Plantation State Park; 8 a.m. — 5 p.m., Greenwood, MS. Call 455-3821 or 3822.

### May 5

Eudora Welty Stories, Featuring Welty scholar in residence from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Leflore County Library, Greenwood, MS.

### May 9, 10, 11, 16, & 17

Vicksburg Little Theatre, 3101 Confederate Ave., presents a romantic comedy, Vicksburg, MS. Call 636-0471.

### May 11

Special Event: East Gallery, Jackson Symphony Orchestra, Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, MS.

### May 17

Vicksburg Foundation for Historic Preservation will hold an auction of antiques and semi-antiques. Proceeds to go to the foundation. 7 p.m., Vicksburg, MS. Call 636-6514.

### May 24

Crosstie Arts Festival in Cleveland, MS, Courthouse grounds. Watercolor, paintings, sculpture, needlework, pottery, baked goods, and entertainment.

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## JUNE

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Oil Paintings/mixed media, exhibited by Paula Woods, Bolivar County Library, Cleveland, MS 38732.

### June 1 - September 28

"Walter Anderson's Calendar", Mississippi artist Walter Anderson's art exhibited at the State Historical Museum in Jackson, MS. Free.

### June 1 - 7

Indianola's week long Centennial Celebration. Events include Jackson Symphony orchestra concert, Centennial Parade, "The History of Indianola" in a play, Outdoor concert by B. B. King, Old-fashioned picnic with entertainment, games, food, and fireworks. For more information contact Indianola Chamber of Commerce, Indianola, MS, 887-4454.

## CONTINUING EVENTS

**City Library** — Inverness, 265-5179. In Miniature, handmade replicas of old original homes, school, depot, hotel, churches and other buildings no longer standing. On display at City Library, open Monday thru Friday.

**The Burrus House** — Hwy. 448, ½ mile east of Benoit, 742-3425. Built ca. 1858 by one of the earliest settlers in Bolivar County. Open by appointment. Admission.

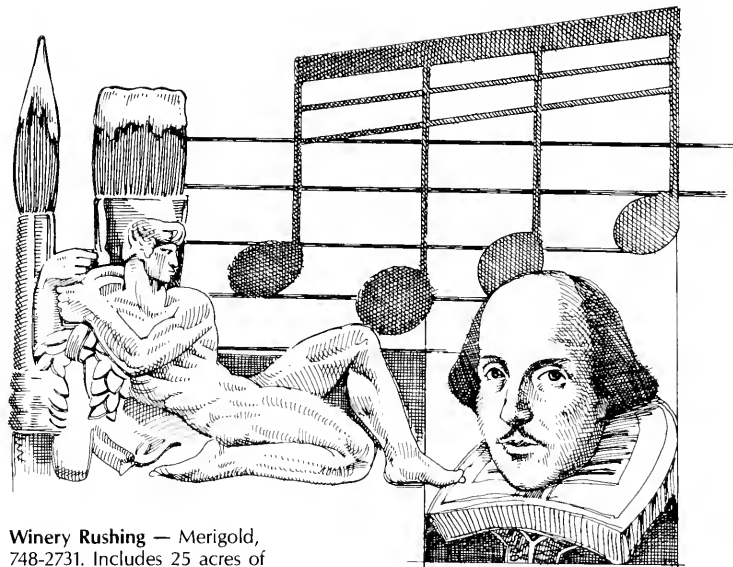
**Archaeological Museum** — Carnegie Public Library, 114 Delta Ave., 624-4461, Clarksdale. Collections include rudimentary Mississippi pottery and other related artifacts, research materials, and periodic changing art exhibits. Open year round. Free.

**Delta Blues Museum** — 1109 State Street, Clarksdale, 624-4156. Dedicated to the history and influence of the blues and its artists. Open year round.

**Weatherbee House** — 238 Belmont Drive, Greenville, 387-2538, 332-8148. Changing art exhibits in restored late 19th century cottage. Open year round. Wednesday 1-3 and by appointment. Admission.

**Cottonlandia Museum** — Greenwood, 453-0925. Regional historical museum depicting history of the Delta over the past 10,000 years. Open year round except holidays, Tuesday - Friday 9-5, Saturday - Sunday 2-5. Free.

**Florewood River Plantation State Park** — Greenwood, 455-3821, 455-3822. Offers traditional museum displays and living history presentations of the lifestyle typical of antebellum cotton plantations. Museum open year round; plantation open March - November, except holidays; Tuesday - Saturday 9-5, Sunday 1-5. Admission.



**Winery Rushing** — Merigold, 748-2731. Includes 25 acres of vineyards and Mississippi's first winery since Prohibition. Restaurant, free wine tasting, grist mill featuring stone ground corn meal. Open year round, except holidays, Tuesday - Saturday 10-5.

**Governor's Mansion** — 300 E. Capital Street, Jackson, 359-3175. Restored Greek Revival mansion, home of Mississippi's governors since 1842; collection of 19th century decorative arts. Open year round by appointment; Tuesday - Friday 9:30-11:30. Free.

**The Old Court House Museum** — Court Square, Vicksburg, 636-0741. Historical museum reflecting Southern heritage in 1858 Court House building. Open year round; Monday - Saturday 8:30-4:30, Sunday 1:30-4:30. Admission.

**Vicksburg National Military Park** — Vicksburg, 636-0583. Encompasses entire battlefield of Civil War Siege of Vicksburg and includes monuments and Visitors Center with museum displaying artifacts, dioramas and narrative film. Open year round; Monday - Sunday 8-5, June - August until 6. Free.

**Wister Gardens** — 1 mile north of Belzoni. A beautiful estate open for your enjoyment year round, 8 a.m. — 5 p.m. Phone 247-3025.

**Ethel Mohamed's Stitchery** — 307 Central, Belzoni. Call for appointment, 247-1433. Mrs. Mohamed has gained fame with her heirloom stitchery, and has work in the Smithsonian, Washington, D.C. and recently had reproductions made of one to be sold. Others not for sale; daughter, Joy Mohamed Fulcher, hostess.

**Riverboat Excursions** — **The Delta Queen** and the **Mississippi Queen** are authentic sternwheelers reminiscent of the riverboat era. These beautiful symbols of a bygone age are operated year round by the Delta Queen Steamboat Company, so all information concerning various cruise packages and schedules should be requested from your local travel agent or by contacting: Delta Queen Steamboat Company, 130 Robinson St. Wharf, New Orleans, LA 70130, 1-800-543-1949.

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# FORUM FORUM

Dear Rebecca,

You cannot imagine how pleased and excited we are about your wonderful review of our cookbook in the *Delta Scene* magazine.

We are especially pleased that those who rely on you to direct their attention toward good new books will discover for themselves just how right they are to place their confidence in you!

We loved the image that placed us with "classics" and certainly hope we can maintain that!

Suzanne adds her deep appreciation to mine — we are both truly grateful!

Sincerely,  
Gay Thompson

Dear Dr. Lamar,

What a pleasant surprise to see my article, "The Old Tent Shows", in the recent issue of *Delta Scene*. I'm honored that you considered my story worthy of publication in your excellent magazine. The story does indeed bring back many happy memories of my childhood here at Rena Lara.

Please convey my thanks to Samuel Little for the great illustrations complementing my article. He did a superb job.

Keep up the good work with *Delta Scene*!

Sincerely,  
Delma Furniss

Dear Rebecca,

The article you wrote about my daughter-in-law's cook book was just wonderful in the last *Delta Scene*. Thank you so very much! She's been so busy going to cooking schools I don't know if she's written or not. Anyhow, she loved it.

Is your Mother's rick rack cactus still living? I hope she could root it ok.

Thanks again for the good article!

Sincerely,  
Arwin

P.S. Where can I get your book about Biscuits???



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# Malmaison: the "House of Sorrow"?

by Cherrie Sanders

In 1845, one hundred and forty-one years ago, there was erected in Carroll County, approximately 12 miles from Greenwood and 8 miles from Carrollton, a truly magnificent house. Its owner, Greenwood Leflore, the last great chief of the Choctaw nation, filled it with priceless treasures from Europe and called it "Malmaison".

Might there have been an ill omen in his selection of a name? Legend would have us believe that Greenwood Leflore was a great admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte and Josephine, and history further tells us that when Napoleon divorced Josephine she was sent to the French countryside to her private residence, "Malmaison", "the house of sorrow" or "the house of tears".

Malmaison was completely destroyed by a fire of unknown origin on March 31, 1942. The nights were still cool enough that a fire might have been necessary and the brick in the fireplace might have been faulty—one can only surmise.

Greenwood Leflore was the son of Louis LeFleur, a French Canadian who, in 1792, came into the Mississippi Territory and eventually established an inn on the Natchez Trace. His wife, Rebecca Cravat, was half Choctaw Indian and half French. In 1812, their 12-year-old son Greenwood was taken by a family friend, Major Donley, to his home in Nashville so that the boy might receive a more substantial education. When Greenwood returned to his family five years later, he spelled his name Leflore and had taken as his bride Rosa Donley, his benefactor's daughter.

In 1826, at age 26, he was chosen a chief of the Choctaw nation and at

30, by popular vote, Greenwood was elected head chieftain of the tribe. He ruled the nation firmly, controlling superstitions and avoiding quarrels with whites, even traveling to Washington as a representative of his people.

Much of the territory of the Choctaws had been ceded to the United States by virtue of the Treaty of Doak's Stand in 1820. The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830 saw what remained of the tribe's vast holdings transferred to the federal government in exchange for lands in the Indian territory or grants within the state. While on the one hand Leflore was lauded for having saved the peace conference, he was also blamed by his tribe for the shortcomings of a treaty that had been met with great disappointment.

His influence with his tribe lost, Leflore separated from the Choctaws, became a U.S. citizen, and served in the Mississippi State Senate from 1841-1844. In 1861 he opposed Mississippi's secession from the United States and remained loyal to the nation until the last. He flew the American flag high atop Malmaison during the War Between the States, and upon his death on August 21, 1865, his body was wrapped in the American flag as was his wish. The town of Greenwood is named for him, as is Leflore County.

In 1845, when Leflore had reached the pinnacle of success, recognized by state and nation, owner of 15,000 acres and 400 slaves, a producer of thousands of bales of cotton each year, he selected a young architect from Georgia, James Clark Harris, and commissioned him to design and build a new house on the site halfway between the present towns

of Carrollton and Greenwood, where he had previously built a log cabin, then a small frame house.

The main part of the house was a square with halls running north and south and east and west, forming a maltese cross. The one running north and south measured 50 by 20 feet; the one east and west 45 by 15 feet, each having double doors 10 feet high, 6 feet wide, and two and one half inches thick, opening onto four porticos.

On the northeast side of the house was an ell containing a 60 foot dining room and a butler's pantry. The upper floor plan was the same as that below, with doors of the same dimensions opening on four balconies surrounded by wrought iron balustrades. The ceilings of the balconies were finished with the same plastering as the interior.

There were galleries both above and below, extending around the ell, connecting the west with the north porticos and balconies. The house contained 15 rooms, eight of which measured 20 by 25 by 15 feet. Eleven rooms had black Italian marble mantels.

All inside doors were 10 feet high, 3 feet wide, and two and one half inches thick. The house was a glorified example of the cornice bracket and jigsaw ornament, according to J. Frazer Smith in his book *White Pillars*. Smith writes that the main cornice was crowned by still two other cornices, one the promenade deck, the other the top of the cupola. The mass at the top of the house resembled the decking of a great river steamer, so much so that it has been suggested that this was the inspiration for the jigsaw style.

*continued*





*A view of the 60 foot dining room in Malmaison containing an 18-foot-long table with 14 leaves. Hanging above the Black Italian Marble mantel at one end of the room is a portrait of Greenwood Leflore.*

The sills of the house were hand hewn out of cypress placed up off the ground and left in the woods for a year, so that they might be thoroughly seasoned for building materials. The woodwork was of heart pine and cypress. The mills of Greenwood Leflore prepared the timber, and oxen hauled it to the building site. The brick, made from native Carroll County red clay, was kilned not far from the building site.

Leflore ordered the finest furniture in Paris. There is the story that when the Duchess of Orleans saw the parlor suite she inquired for whom it was being made. "For an Indian chief in Mississippi," she was told. "What could a savage want with such furniture?" she exclaimed, and

ordered it duplicated for herself.

The more than 30 pieces of the original furniture were of Louis XIV period in gold leaf over hickory, upholstered in crimson silk brocade damask. Numerous pieces of this unbelievably exquisite furniture are still cherished by descendants of Leflore who still live in the Greenwood area. The parlor also boasted hand painted window valances that depicted views of Versailles, Fountainbleau, and of other French chateaus. The furnishings of this room cost over ten thousand dollars over a hundred years ago.

The 60 foot dining room contained an 18-foot-long table with 14 leaves. The china service, imported from France, was for 100 and was marked

with Leflore's initials.

The four acre lawn, sodded in Bermuda grass, was dotted with oak, maple, and holly. The grounds were further enhanced by wild geese, cranes, deer, quail, squirrel, wild turkeys, and migratory fowl. These the owner prized and protected, many years in advance of state laws for the protection of wild life. Greenwood Leflore was the need of such laws and enforced them within his own rights.

Unfortunately, many of the plans he had for Malmaison, such as the construction of a reservoir, using hollowed-out cedar logs for conveying the water, were never to be realized, because of the War Between the States.



*Illustration by Norman Cupit*

# TOMCAT SPRING

by Pete Sones

The two women watched Ole Tom, Miss Dora's cat, as it crept through the jonquils that lined the sidewalk. The ever alert proprietor of his yard, he had been attracted by a movement in the hedge row that separated Miss Dora's property from the nearest neighbor's.

A strange male cat stepped out into the yard, unaware that he was being watched. Tom hunched down lower, ready to spring from his jonquil blind, remaining still as the newcomer started his light-footed prance across the yard. As the cat approached the hiding place Tom stepped out with his tail raised and his back already beginning to arch. The intruder hopped back a couple of steps in his surprise, raising his back in a mirrored movement, his fine yellow hair suddenly alive and standing out from his curved body in straight lines as if he were willing himself bigger. Tom released a long deep growl as he laid his ears back and raised his big back higher. Without further hesitation the stranger streaked back through the hedge and beyond, disappearing somewhere in the neighbor's yard.

Tom relaxed and laid down in the warm grass, suddenly aware of a Redwinged Blackbird that had landed high up in the hedges. Miss Dora saw the bird too.

"My Daddy always said if you saw a Redwinged Blackbird down low in the willows at the river, that there was fish in the water right under the bird," she said.

Pearl was sick of Dora. "Dem fish eat birds, or does de birds eat fish?" she asked. Since Miss Dora's head

was partially turned she allowed herself a small disbelieving face.

"Neither one," Miss Dora answered, still without looking at Pearl. "Birds eat bugs, an' when they land down low that way the bugs jump in the water, an' fish eat bugs too. So see, the fish just swim to the willows when they see the birds landin'."

"Yessum." Pearl could now see the logic, and felt a little twinge of guilt about her previous doubt. If she hadn't been so sick of Dora she would have really felt bad.

"I don't need a calendar this time a year. You can smell the dirt when they start plowin' an' just feel the time inside yourself," Miss Dora continued.

Dora sat in the fragile spring sun on the front porch. Across from her sat Pearl, the black woman paid to keep house and be a companion to the seventy-nine year old woman.

Spring had arrived in Marks, Mississippi. It seemed that the flowers in the front yard had blossomed almost overnight. Splendid forsythia and spiraea, planted close, rose to almost block the view on one end of the porch; their long thin limbs climbed and mixed their hundreds of bud-like white and yellow blooms in a wall of color that dispersed the young sun's rays into mottled patches of contrasting light and shade across the end of the porch.

Miss Dora was right about smelling the earth. Surrounding farmers had begun to rip the dirt that had lain wet and black all winter, ripping and waking the fallow soil with

rolling Bush and Bog disk blades and releasing the fertile aroma into the spring air.

"Don't seem natural not to see Willis Neal headin' fishin' everyday now spring's here. Why, that boy used to bring me a mess a fish at least once a week 'fore he went off."

Pearl had heard Dora make this statement at least once—usually several times a day—everyday for the last three weeks. Pearl had long since tired of the repetitions of thought and remembrance that had increased as the old lady progressed into deeper senility. Ordinarily she would have just ignored Dora, but it had been a long winter for the maid. Dora had been sick most of the winter. Sick, and oddly enough, awake—awake and demanding in that whiney voice that she always used when she wanted sympathy for pains, either real or imagined; a frail whiney voice made further maddening by the exaggeration of her natural southern drawl. She used that same thick, sweet, Atlantan accent that had wooed suitors to silliness in her youth, and made her the much emulated queen of the Marks Garden Club and other traditional Southern social circles. That same voice failed to impress Pearl.

It had been a long winter and Pearl wasn't in her best mood anyway. Her man hadn't been around to see her in almost three weeks. Oh, Fred Lee wasn't fooling her in the least. Her sister had seen him coming out of Lillie Stone's Cafe with that "trash" and had reported straight to Pearl. The uppity

*continued*

way that her sister had told the event (almost as if she were glad; she had always suspected that her sister was jealous of her when it came to Fred Lee) had irritated Pearl almost as much as the knowledge of the infidelity. At first she had tried to pass the rumor off as so much conjecture on her sister's part but with the passage of time had realized the obvious truth behind his absence. The passage of time had also allowed her anger to grow into something that she could not control.

Pearl was tired of the old woman and in a sure enough bad mood about Fred Lee. So, with nothing else to vent her frustration upon, she did something totally out of character: she voiced a sharp and pointed opinion about a white person to another white person. She had learned from early childhood that there were certain advantages to be gained by knowing nothing, especially when dealing with white people. She understood that for her to step out of character would confuse and scare them, and white people were harder to control when they were frightened by anything.

"Who was that just passed in that truck?" Miss Dora would ask. Her eyesight was failing and in the manner of all people who had grown up at a time when traffic was rare, wondered where people were going at all hours of the day.

"I don't know. Look like a white falluh," Pearl would invariably answer, whether she knew or not. For this, and other harmless pieces of acting, Pearl would stay in Miss Dora's good graces. Besides, one never knew, the person in the truck might have some mean reason for not wanting anyone to know his business.

"God bless her, I don't know what my Pearl would do without me, but she is a good girl!" she would hear Dora say when the young preacher came to call on Tuesdays, and she would know that her job was secure. She could then go on nodding in subservient agreement to the old woman's household instructions and then proceed to do, or not do, chores as she deemed necessary.

This one time she slipped out of character. "You knows dat man in jail, Miss Dora! You talkin' crazy! You know he ain't comin' home, not since he kill dat man! You know he ain..." her voice trailed off when she realized the rule she was breaking.

Luckily, it seemed that Dora had refused to hear her, as she often did when people said things that she didn't want to hear.

"I'll be glad when Willis gets home, so we can have a mess a fresh fish," she said, as if Pearl had never spoken.



What Pearl had said was true. Willis Neal was in jail.

Caught up in the idle hunger that had choked the nation he had moved in wider circles, spreading away from Marks in search of work. The year was 1938 and the boost that the threatening war in Europe had given the nation had not yet reached the deep South.

His trouble had begun the previous summer with John Thompson leading the way. "They's jobs to be had in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, on the govmnt dam," John had promised. The two young friends stood waist deep in Albert Walker's pond seining for bait to set hooks with on the nearby Coldwater River. At this time of year fish became a staple on the tables of Quitman County. They had supplemented their diet earlier in the year by hunting the small game that was abundant in the county, but now that the "Dog

Days" of summer were on them the small animals had become infested with "wolves"; the larva of insects thought to be harmful if ingested by man. Neither Willis nor John had had to see Sirius, the "Dog Star", rising to know what time of year it was — it certainly hadn't taken looking at the sky to know that it was hot in the Delta.

"Jim an' Sam Lawler jist come back with money in their pants, so you know they's least two jobs to be had over there! Probly more!" John continued. Both men had jobs coming up picking cotton, but harvest was a long time away, and besides, John hated picking. He hated the thought of crawling between the long rows until his knees got sore. It seemed to him that every year, just as he got accustomed to the job, the season would end. Also, he got paid by the number of pounds he picked and had never made much money at it, especially during the last few years, what with the overload of field hands and the price of cotton being so low.

"Slave work, nuthin' but slave work. You do slave work you'll have to live like one!" he exclaimed. "Besides, the crops ain't even laid by yet, an' it'll be another year 'till pickin'. What we gonna do for change 'till pickin' time? We gonna lay 'round the palace watchin' dancin' girls an' eatin' high off the hog? Lay 'round an' starve, that's what!" He spoke quickly, having rehearsed, not giving Willis a chance to argue.

"We'd starve knowin' they's jobs close as the Alabama line! Money jist layin' there! You heard 'em talkin' 'bout the food on them jobs!" The promised food especially attracted John; he was one of those wirey little redheads that could eat more than two big men, whetting his appetite with nervous and non-productive movement like a small red fiest dog.

"An' you seen the green they had!" he continued. "Didn't see neither one a us showin' the color a our money did you? Naw, 'cause we didn't have none, an' ain't gonna git none neither! Least not layin' 'round

*continued*

here in Marks, Mississippi, waitin' for no cotton time! We gotta go! Thank about your family!"

John wouldn't have dared go by himself, so he stayed after the larger boy, wearing him down with persistence. Night and day he preached, until Willis could almost see himself there.

Willis finally went to Babe with his plan.

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"Why can't you git a job closer to home?" Babe asked. Willis had been seeing Babe for years and people naturally assumed that they were heading for marriage.

"Why can't we jist git married an' live in town? Daddy's gittin' old an' Mama's gittin' harder to live with all the time. Couldn't you jist git a job close by an' us go ahead an' marry? You wouldn't have to make much!"

"I can't find nuthin'," he explained. "I even been to Clarksdale an' they jist ain't nuthin', Babe."

She then began to cry, the way she could when she wanted something, low and soft, almost soundless, with her back turned.

"Don't cry, Babe, I'll be back when I git some money, an' we can git married an' have a place in town, once't I get staked. I won't be gone long, but I got to go. They jist ain't nuthin' here!"

"You comin' home by Christmas?"

"Yeah, sure I will, an' I'll have money, an' we can git married."

"You promise?"

"I promise!"

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Late fall came to the Delta, Late fall, with that special feeling of excitement that hangs like suspended electricity in the cooler air. Babe felt the magic air when the cotton gin cranked its steady heartbeat chug, filling the town's sky with escaped lint. Farmers with newly earned money packed the poor stores of main street that had waited all winter and summer for the harvest that would bring enough trade to allow them to wait another year. Brash autumn leaves and brightly colored golden rod and wild daisies

formed a spectacle across the wide flat land. Even the evergreen Cypress that lined the river had begun to rust with the changing season.

Babe was alone and waiting.

Winter swept across the Delta. A cold wind that raked the colorful leaves from the trees in giant sweeps, killing the color and leaving a grey and black world in its wake—black earth with trees stripped naked, trees that rose like slender black fingers out of the black ground to meet the solid grey sky.

Babe was alone and waiting at Christmas.

Willis did not come home. He had a good job and hoped to make enough to start a good life in Marks by spring.

Pearl was madder than ever. This time she had caught Fred Lee herself.

She had gone to Lillie Stone's Cafe on her day off and seated herself in a back booth and ordered a Coke, hoping that he might come in and make up to her. He had come in, but was not alone. Luckily, neither he nor the girl he was with had seen Pearl hidden behind the tall back of her booth, but she could hear them alright. Yes, she could hear all that she had needed to hear as he did his "big talk" to that girl.

"I works down to de feed mill with Cap'n Bullock! Me an de Cap'n, we's tight!", she heard him crow.

Pearl could tell by the thickness of his voice that he had been drinking.

"I can git de Cap'n's six cylinder anytime I wants it!"

Pearl thought about murder, but remained hidden.

*continued on page 22*



# A Mississippi Afternoon at the Opera

by Dolores Scales

When I was little, life at my grandmother's house was usually peaceful. There was not much to break the pattern of day to day living in a small Mississippi town.

But the one thing that never failed to turn our lives upside down was a visit from my grandmothers' friend, Miss Emma. Mamaw, as my grandmother was known to me, had gone to the Young Ladies' Academy with Miss Emma, and the two had remained friends ever since.

Miss Emma, however, had grown a little strange over the years. It seemed that one of her favorite pastimes was carrying on long, involved conversations with her dead husband, radio newscasters, and other unseen beings.

We never knew when Miss Emma was going to appear at Mamaw's house. She would just show up with her battered suitcase, having made the bus ride from her home twenty miles away. Her visits would last anywhere from overnight to several weeks, and it seemed to my eight-year-old mind that the more peculiar Miss Emma grew, the longer her visits would last.

Mamaw could not hurt her friend's feelings by refusing to let her stay with us, but the time came for some sort of desperate action. Mamaw finally hit upon a plan to stave off our unwanted visitor. She decided

I took the other side. Our shade brigade continually bumped into each other, as we zigzagged back and forth through a maze of rooms. Once our job was completed, we would huddle silently in the back hall.

It felt like years before Miss Emma's first piercing, "Yoo-hoo, Millie!" sounded from the front door. We would then wait breathlessly until we heard the same call at the back door. At last, Miss Emma could be heard walking away mumbling, "Millie sure is gone a lot these days." And with our great sighs of relief, life would return to normal.

After a time, we all grew complacent. We felt that with our strong defense system we no longer needed to worry about Miss Emma. Besides, we were excited about the Big News. Mamaw's Ladies' Circle had invited a singer, who was on tour from the Metropolitan Opera, to sing at the Methodist Church. Furthermore, he would be staying at Mamaw's house.

For several weeks the household hummed day and night in preparation for the great arrival. Hattie Lee and Vernell seemed to move all over the place in a mass of soap bubbles. The two elderly sisters decided that our visitor must be almost as important as Roy Rogers. Even I was pretty impressed by this spectacular observation.

Lucy, the best cook in the county, had prepared a huge amount of food

for the opera singer. Lucy's great bulk moved about the kitchen in a flurry of spices and flour. She paused only occasionally to slip me a slice of freshly baked bread thickly covered with butter.

I, for one, planned to spring my single piece of operatic information on our guest. I knew, for a fact, having observed the back cover of a popular weekly magazine, that the Metropolitan Opera star, Rise Stevens (whose name I thought was pronounced "Rice"), smoked a certain brand of cigarettes. Yes, there was "Rice" puffing away, and wearing her costume from "Carmen." I figured "Carmen" must have something to do with Gypsies, because "Rice's" picture showed her wearing hooped earrings and a low-cut blouse.

On the day of the singer's arrival, I mulled over how I would present to him my opera knowledge. Imagining his impressed reaction, I went about helping Mamaw put the final touches on the guest room. Mamaw had just finished arranging a bouquet of flowers, when suddenly we heard from the front door, "Yoo-hoo, Millie!" Mamaw's hand, clutching a large, orange tiger lily, froze in midair. The voice sounded again from just outside the room. And from around the door, peeked the face of Miss Emma. Her tiny, searching eyes darted nervously above her beaky nose.

*continued*



Illustration by Barbara Hutchinson

"Oh, Millie," she gurgled, "I heard about the opera singer and I just had to come. I even hitched a ride on the milk truck to get here. You know how my dear, late husband and I always loved opera. If I could just stay with you a couple of days, I'd be so thrilled. Imagine getting to hear someone from the Met!"

Mamaw, who felt that a southern lady's prime obligation in life is to rise to every occasion, managed an odd, liverish smile and replied in a shaking voice, "Wahy you know we'd love to have you, Emma."

Miss Emma clasped her hands together and, with her scrawny legs, gave a little leap off the floor. "Oh, Millie, I'm sooo thrilled! And, of course, I brought my good dress to wear to the concert."

Mamaw blanched. We were all familiar with Miss Emma's "good dress." She wore it on every occasion that smacked of something social. The "good dress" was a horror in purple and red. Its print was a montage of huge, threatening butterflies that if all the shades in the house were pulled down, Miss Emma would think we had gone away on a trip. The attendant at the bus station was then discreetly bribed to call Mamaw the second he spotted Miss Emma getting off the bus.

When the first call came, we put our plan to work. It went so well that after a few forestalled visits all Mamaw had to do was yell to the household, "Emma's coming!" This call sent our cook, Lucy, and the two cleaning women, Vernell and Hattie Lee, to pull down the shades on one side of the house, while Mamaw and and strange looking flowers of unknown origins.

"Ah, that's real nice, Emma," was all the response that Mamaw could muster, as an air of gloom wafted over both of us. The same feeling of foreboding spread to the rest of the household.

Lucy kept shaking her head and muttering, "That crazy ole' lady!" It was Lucy's considered opinion that if Mamaw allowed Miss Emma to stay, our opera singer would think we were all "funny in the head."

About one o'clock that afternoon Mr. Opera Singer arrived. He turned out to be a lot different from what I had expected. He was a plump, unimposing, little man. His little sparse hair and his eyes were a

peculiar shade of yellow-brown. He seemed plainly impressed with himself, as Mamaw presented him to members of our household.

When Miss Emma's turn came to meet the great man, she went into a deep curtsy. Mr. Opera Singer looked a little stunned but, probably thinking it was a Mississippi Delta custom, made a sort of cautious little bow in return.

Not to be outdone by Miss Emma, I decided that the time was right to impress our guests. "Do you know 'Rice' Stevens?" I ventured knowingly.

Mr. Opera Singer turned his head slowly and fixed me with a condescending look. "Eet ees pronounced Ree'see," he replied in a sugary-vinegry voice. I was completely taken aback; my hopes for some smart chatter about "Carmen" and all the gang at the Met were dashed.

But before I could think of anything else to say, Miss Emma pushed me aside and cooed to the singer, "Won't you favor us with a song or two this afternoon—just as a little preview of your concert?"

"Now, Emma," Mamaw said, "I don't think..."

"No, no, no," interrupted Mr. Opera Singer, with a grand sweep of his arms. "Eet ees no trouble. Eet would geeve me a chance to warm up my voice before the concert."

Mamaw was a firm believer in culture, and everyone under her roof was informed that they would be getting their share of opera that afternoon. However, some of us were not quite certain about our musical opportunity, as we gathered in the living room to hear the singer.

Hattie Lee and Vernell stood, looking a little doubtful, near the door. Obviously, they were ready for a quick escape. I perched on the arm of the Victorian love seat, while Lucy took up her position as watchdog, standing right behind me. As usual, Mamaw had given Lucy the job of making sure that I didn't wiggle too much in front of company.

Mr. Opera singer entered the room and, after surveying his meager audience, began speaking with Mamaw about his selection of songs.

*continued on page 28*

# LIGE MILLER

## Artisan



by Andy McWilliams

When I first met Lige Miller he ambled into David's Diner in Shelby, Mississippi, and asked with his humble smile if he could share a table with me. He introduced himself and said, "I'm a good nigger. I just drink too much whiskey."

After I finished my cheeseburger, and started to leave, Lige asked if I'd "please" give him a ride home. When we got to his mother's little wood frame house across the tracks, he asked if I'd like to see his tractors. Lige talks about his scale model tractors, combines, cotton pickers, and other farm equipment as if they were ready to go to the field.

We went to his small workshop room in the back of his mother's house, and he showed me his mess of wires and wood blocks. A cotton picker with a basket load of cotton caught my eye. Lige showed me the engine and promised to have it running when I came back. As I was leaving Lige borrowed a dollar and told me I could find him at David's Diner or the liquor store down the street.

A couple of weeks later I left word with Michael Nassar at the liquor store for Lige to have his models ready to roll the next day. Sure enough, Lige was as ready as a Delta farmer expecting a front moving in. Those that weren't running, he tinkered with until they did.

Lige makes his tractors, trucks, combines, and cotton pickers out of plywood and all kinds of little odds and ends he finds around town; he builds the motors for his models out

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*He has no formal training in his craft. Lige only went to school through the third grade. With a lusty sparkle in his eyes he says: "I want an education. If I only had an education...I want to learn Science."*

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of spare parts (sprockets) he gets from electric clocks and sewing machines. And they run good too. When the cotton picker has all its parts, it will even dump a load of cotton onto a wooden trailer pulled by one of Lige's John Deere tractors.

All of his machinery are John Deere replicas; his tractor pulls a disk when it isn't planting. Lige built a planter using snuff cans as the seed hoppers. The lights on his cotton picker are the ends of medicine bottles, and the water tank on the picker is an aerosol spray paint can painted yellow — exactly like the ones on John Deere cotton pickers.

Lige has always loved farming; he was born 38 years ago on the McMurchee Plantation near Duncan. He grew up chopping and picking cotton by hand. "I used to love picking cotton. Niggers can't make money no more." Now he builds replicas of the machines that took his job.

Lige says he first started building his models when he worked at David Fava's gas station in Shelby. He had access to a few tools and a little time in between pumping gas

and fixing flats.

He has no formal training in his craft. Lige only went to school through the third grade. With a lusty sparkle in his eyes he says: "I want an education. If I only had an education... I want to learn Science." Lige reads science books and electrical/mechanical diagrams now; he dreams of bigger things: "I wanna invent a dish-washer. These dish-washers nowadays, they don't do a good enough job. I want to make one that scrubs the dishes — like a car wash."

Farming accidents concern Lige; he plans to build a device that will turn farm machinery off if the driver falls asleep or falls off the machine. He says if the operator were to fall from the tractor, the tractor would stop, thus preventing further injuries; he believes this invention could save the life of a heart attack victim in the field.

A sincere humanitarian, Lige wants to teach his skill to young boys who are in trouble. He believes he could help rehabilitate them and keep them out of trouble by giving them something to do. "It sure keeps

me out of trouble," he laughs.

During the winter Lige stays busy in his little shop. He hopes to build some crop dusters and make something out of a toy computer he has. One of his tractors needs a hydraulic lift to lower and raise the planter. Lige has devised a hydraulic system out of hypodermic needles and water which he says works; he hopes to have it working by spring planting season.

Money doesn't come his way too often. He makes a little washing cars and doing odd jobs for local businessmen; he says he gets a "check". Even with hard times upon him, he is in no hurry to sell his models. (His friend Michael Nassar says he has pawned them to friends for \$3.00 so he could get two half pints.) If he does sell them, they won't be cheap. The pleasure Lige finds in his work is not money. Like a true artist, his pleasure is the art.

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*Andy McWilliams graduated from Delta State University, and is presently employed by the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi.*

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# "Care today... Character tomorrow"

by Bonnie Horton

*Send us, O God as Thy messengers to hearts without a home, to lives without love, to the crowds without a guide, send us to the children whom none have blessed, to the famished whom none have visited, to the fallen whom none have lifted, to the bereaved whom none have comforted...*



Louise Crump, first President

So begins the official prayer of the National Association of Junior Auxiliaries, an organization dedicated to the improvement of the physical, emotional, and educational welfare of the people in its community. Particular emphasis is placed on helping children. "Care today... Character tomorrow" is the motto which expresses the belief that a healthy, safe child grows into a productive, caring citizen, who, in turn, will contribute something positive to his community when he becomes an adult.

NAJA was founded on these principles by a group of warm-hearted, caring Delta women. On November 3, 1941, 100 women from ten towns in Mississippi and Arkansas met in Greenville, Mississippi, to discuss the possibility of a national organization dedicated to the improvement of the civic, cultural, educational, financial, and social welfare of their communities. The group's aim was to band together for strength without losing any of the individuality of member groups. Mrs. Louise Crump of Greenville and Mrs. Lucia Thompson of Leland were two of the leading figures in the formation of NAJA, which came into being on November 14, 1941. Louise Crump was the first president and

Lucia Thompson helped to draft a constitution. This original organization of ten chapters has now expanded to 73 chapters in four states: Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Although strengthened by size, the organization has not lost sight of its original goal for each individual chapter to work for child welfare in its own area, meeting local needs.

Through many well-organized projects these member groups help to enhance the lives of local people. Although the physical needs of impoverished persons come first, the NAJA groups also sponsor cultural and educational programs and school health projects. The National Association of Junior Auxiliaries Handbook of Information defines the organization as "a serious endeavor on the part of young women to become active and constructive participants in the communities in which they live and to assume responsible leadership in meeting the problems of their communities."

Projects undertaken to meet the goals of the organization vary according to the needs of the local chapters. Projects such as thrift shops where used clothing can be purchased at very low prices, helping needy families at Christmas, and

emergency aid to indigent families bring immediate relief to economically-deprived groups. Assisting with eye and ear examinations in public schools and providing individual, one-on-one instruction for mentally-retarded children give much-needed help to the public school teachers who do not have the time to crowd these activities into their harried schedules. Sponsorship of plays, puppet shows, and musical programs for school children provide educational as well as cultural enrichment to the young people of the community.

Provisional or new members quickly learn to accept responsibility and to act quickly and efficiently in times of crisis. They spend several months in a training program in which they learn how NAJA functions, how the individual chapters meet the needs of the community, and how to organize and execute projects. The new members are also introduced to sources of information and aid such as welfare, mental health, and employment centers on whom they can call for help. By the end of the training period, the provisionals can competently rally the fastest and most effective sources of help available in situations calling for organized assistance.

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# GALLERY GOURMET

## Peavines: Still Bringing People Together

by Yvonne Tomek

*Two things are essential in life: to give good dinners and to keep on fair terms with women. As the years pass and fires cool, it can become unimportant to stay always on fair terms either with women or one's fellows, but a wide and sensitive appreciation of fine flavours can still abide with us, to warm our hearts.*

— Talleyrand

It seems that near the vestiges of an old and anachronistic railroad station in downtown Cleveland, restaurateurs are destined to find good enterprise. There is indeed something romantic about dining that is capitalized with a view, especially if it happens to be remarkably beautiful (What about La Tour d'Argent overlooking the Seine and The Notre Dame Cathedral or, even locally, The Rushing Tearoom with a view on the Sunflower?) or, in this case, if it conjures up memories of halcyon days and a way of life that, regrettably, will be no more.

The South has always had a penchant for the retrospective, it is true. And now, in a year when Cleveland is celebrating its Centennial, we may engage in it a little more. We're allowed, after all. The arrival of a new restaurant situated on Sharpe Street across from the old train depot has strategic advantage in terms of historical associations. Its name? Peavines. Does the name mean something to you? It should if you are Delta folks worth your salt when it comes to Mississippi history. It is the name of the rail line that from the turn of the century until it was requisitioned by the War Department and abandoned in 1942 linked the west side of Bolivar County to the east side. The Peavine back then brought the mail and THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL from Memphis and brought traveling salesmen from the Bluff City. For \$5 — \$10 a person could take the 250 mile round trip, a bargain even in those



Enjoying the lounge at Peavines are from left: Frances Janoush, Cricket Jose and Les Pearman.

Photo by Yvonne Tomek

Depression Days. As the story goes, the name itself came about from the fact that train engineers would know that they were approaching the train stations when they spotted those peavined covered sheds in the distance, the vines themselves serving double purposes of landmark and refrigeration for the dairy products often harbored underneath and waiting to be carted away.

Les Pearman, along with his wife Kathy, Joe Janoush, and Paul Janoush, owns and manages Peavines, the restaurant. (Mr. Pearman tells me all of this information about the railroad after I naively ask him if the word involves a family name, I myself not being worth a great amount of salt when it comes to these historical details. One may turn, however, to the newly released book CLEVELAND: A CENTENNIAL HISTORY, 1886-1986 by Linton Weeks to find out more about this town's past cultural developments including citations of how the Pearmans were one of Cleveland's thirteen founding families back in the early 1800s.) Mr. Pearman is not new to business in the Delta. He

owned the Marina Restaurant until August of this year. You may have known him when he helped Jimmy T. Robinson and Randall Harvey with the Sweet Olive in Boyle. He and Doug Collier collaborated to renovate that village and he opened Bogart's there about seven years ago, a place full of good food and atmosphere, as I remember it back then. In Greenville, he is a co-owner of the C & G Restaurant.

It is clear that Peavines Restaurant is a culmination of a lot of multimedia expertise. Bricked and cypress with high, sculpted, freshly painted white ceilings, it has a feel of rustic-newness about it. There are two lofts opening unto a great dining room below, one containing a bar encased on one wall with wide windows letting in streams of sunlight and a view upon the railroad. The other loft consists of a few cozy tables with another panoramic view over the whole place. Most everyone involved in a business capacity here has had a hand in decorating. Frances Janoush coordinated color schemes while

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Wayne Cobb risked life and limb to adorn that gigantesque ceiling.

Luncheon may be procured from quite an elegant buffet. There is a salad buffet with compotes and gelled fruit salads and vegetable mixtures served with a choice of assorted dressings. On another table a sumptuous variety of entrees are available. The day I am there, there is a beautiful ham, turkey and dressing servings, sliced beef strips, homemade soup, mushrooms and rice, carrots sauteed in butter and a few other vegetables. A dessert comes with the buffet and today apple cobbler is offered that tastes as if some "spirits" may have been simmered in the juices, although I am not certain. It is surprising that a smorgasbord of this dimension is only \$4.75 a person.

Supper is served at night from 6—9:30 Monday through Saturday and is ordered a la carte, availing one to such choices as stuffed mushrooms, crab claws, and seafood gumbo for appetizers. In the realm of seafood, there are several possibilities; among them a steamed lobster, gulf flounder with crabmeat stuffing, Lobster Newberg, fried select oysters, and a seafood platter, featuring samples of various fish entrees at once.

The Chateaubriand sounds intriguing. It is the same as served at the C & G Restaurant in Greenville and has been cited by Epicureas, the renowned food critic in Jackson, as one of the top dishes in the state. Most of the meats are charcoal cooked. Mr. Pearman vaunts the catfish fillets stuffed with crabmeat, lemon, butter, and garlic and he also strongly endorses the blackened fish. "What in the world is blackened fish?" I ask. I am informed that it is fish that is brushed with butter and a hot and spicy seasoning and then thrown on a hot, cast-iron skillet and "burned".

Les Pearman is the main cook here, along with Melvin Lyons who has had many years experience as a chef. Mr. Lyons is an outstanding cook from the Marina and has worked in conjunction with Mr. Pearman for quite some time. Lois Pearman makes all the desserts, ranging from blackbottom pie, millionaire pie, apple cobbler, and chocolate and shifon swirls.

There is a pianist at this restaurant named Boogaloo who has played with Count Basie, Lou Rawls, and with the late Arthur Pearman back in the days of the Big Bands here in the Delta. Today, he is quietly playing a few renditions as an exuberant crowd is gathering in.

One may reserve tables for private parties. Mixed drinks are provided by the bar. The lounge opens at 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday. The cuisine is delectable and the ambiance is a combination of chic and casual and fun. Ernest Duval in

his CULINARY ART has said, "If we do admit that to eat is a natural obligation for all living beings, we must also realize that cooking is an agreeable and reasoned preparation of ingredients, refined and perfected to the cadence of civilization and is in part its measure." Thus speaking, Peavines represents well the ascendance of culture here in Mississippi.

*Yvonne Tomek holds an M.A. degree in English and is presently an instructor at Delta State University.*



*Illustration by Marie, an artist*

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"Shoot, one dees days I gonna git dat six an' drive all over Marks, Mississippi! You won't know none a me girl! I be drivin' 'round eatin' Anglish grapes an' drankin' colds. I be big! Big as de Cap'n hisself!"

They then launched into a period of quieter conversation that Pearl could not hear, but she felt like she understood the occasional laughter. Finally they left, but not before the damage had been done.

Pearl was home now but the sting of what she had heard at the cafe was still in her. "Supper ready, Miss Dora," she announced.

As Dora hobbled into the dining room a mouse scurried from beneath the china cabinet headed for the kitchen. The quick grey shadow slid around the corner and darted to the safety of the empty room.

Both women had seen the mouse. "Where dat ole Tom Cat when we needs hem?" Pearl asked.

"It's springtime and he's out Tom Cattin'. He'll be back once he gets whipped. Tom Cats are that way, it seems. They get tired layin' up, then they want to step out for a while, check out some new ground. He'll come home when some other cat whips him for bein' in the wrong place, or for tryin' to take something that don't belong to him."

Pearl had already started building a plan. Maybe Fred Lee would come on home.

Dora seated herself at the table and Pearl set a plate of cornbread, sweet potatoes, and turnip greens in front of her.

After a quick and silent blessing she began to eat, picking slowly at her food. "Sure is good, Pearl," she said. "Be better with a young 'Possum. Remember that 'Possum that Neal boy brought us one time? We'll eat better when he gets back!"

"Ole fool!" Pearl thought. "Dat man in jail! He ain't never comin' home!"

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Babe's mother didn't mind the Johnson grass that almost hid the ankle high corn in the small vegetable garden. With a good stout chop of the hoe and a strong tug backward the long grass, roots and all, tore loose in big clumps from the rich dirt. What she hated was the Timothy and Bermuda that had to be pulled by hand from around the plants. Although toughened by years of hard farm labor, she was at an age when stooping made her joints ache with the same feverish pain that had terrorized her when the weather was either cold or damp. She particularly hated the Bermuda that ran along the middles and around the young corn, running and attaching its roots in a hard grip on the soil every few inches, making it impossible to completely clean the rows. She knew that anything left unpulled, even if only a small shard of root, would regenerate and spread, and the back breaking job would be to do over. She had hoped that Babe would spend more time at home.

She stood, wiping the sweat from her brow with one hand and pushing at the soreness in the small of her back with the other.

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"You can't hold out like you used to," she heard from behind her, and turned to see who it was.

She stood for several seconds looking at Willis, "So you came home," she finally said.

It was spring and he had come back to Marks with enough money to get married.

"Where's Babe, Miss Anglin?"

Maudie Anglin laughed, rich and loud.

"Miss Anglin?"

Maudie leaned on the hoe, now serious, "Willis an' the Babe," she said in a sneering voice, "Willis and the Babe, that's all I ever heard. Weel, Sonny-boy, you jist better be gittin used to Willis without the Babe!"

"What you talkin' 'bout, Miss Anglin? Make sense!"

Maudie started laughing again, wild and scarey, "She's gone fool! Gone, you heah? You run off an' left her, an' you're sorry as all git out jist like I said you was!" As she talked the laughter that had first filled her speech slowly died. When she finished her last sentence she stood silently eyeing Willis with one eyebrow arched, as if daring him to prove her wrong.

"Where's Babe?" was all that Willis could say.

Maudie knelt to the ground and started pulling weeds with a vengeance. After a long silence, save for the snap of the Bermuda roots that she ripped from the dirt, she dropped her face to her hands and cried. She's in town at the cafe with Herman Griffin. She didn't, or well, she...or at least I...well we didn't think you was comin' back an'...we thought you was off with another woman an'...well, Herman's got lots a money, an'..."

Will had not moved as they talked. He now turned and walked back toward town.

He found Herman and Babe at the cafe and a fight ensued. Herman Griffin was suddenly dead and Willis was in jail, charged with murder.

Pearl didn't waste any time putting her plan into motion. She had known for a long time that "Pea" Johnson had an eye for her. "Pea" was the biggest man that she had ever known. He was tall and broad shouldered, even better, he had a

deep scar that ran the length of one cheek that gave him a look of evil power which just fit in with the plan.

She wanted to make Fred Lee jealous, so she had to make sure that he saw her with "Pea". The logical place was at church. She felt like church would be a safe place if "Pea" turned out to be as mean as he looked, and also, she always sat down front behind the elders, where she was sure to be seen by everyone. Her being at church would be especially maddening to Fred Lee who had often commented on how a good preaching seemed to

work her up.

It was Tuesday, two days after "Pea" had escorted Pearl to church. The young minister of the Marks First Baptist Church had come to see Miss Dora. As he and the old woman sat on the front gallery Pearl was inside fixing iced tea.

"...a good crowd at church las' Sunday, Sister Dora," Pearl heard him say as she started toward the front of the house with the tray of tea. She smiled, remembering that

*continued*



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there had been a good crowd at her church too.

"An' the Sunday school was full too!" Brother Wilson continued. "The good Lord has really blessed us this last year, what with the souls we've saved an' all. I reckon he helped us pave the way to the kingdom for more'n one los' soul in the las' year!"

Sometimes just talking to Dora made the preacher nervous. At times she would just sit for long periods of time with that steady gaze boring right back into his animated face, visually attentive, but not responding. He thought she looked like a snake measuring the distance to a prey. "She's not even blinking," he would think, and the sweat would begin to pour from his sideburns, threatening to stain his expensive shirt.

At other times she might comment, and this could be even worse.

"I reckon being seventy-nine, I'm no child, and I'm closer to the Kingdom than you are," she said. "I been lost, Brother Wilson. I reckon I been lost an' I been found by more than one stray fisherman in my day, an' I 'bout

decided that one's 'bout as good as the other, depending on what frame of mind you're in at the time."

"Oh Lawd, hep us," thought Pearl as she stood inside the screen door and listened. "She doin' it agin!"

"Found?" the young minister asked.

"In the biblical sense, preacher," Dora answered.

Pearl quickly set the tray between them. Brother Wilson used the interruption to change the subject. Dora's nephew was one of his biggest tithers and he couldn't risk a theological argument with the old lady. Besides, he wasn't sure that he could win. "Her havin' an addled mind an' all," he told himself.

"Wisht you coulda heard my las' service, Sister Dora. I preached on the second comin' a Jesus."

"Is he comin' soon?" Dora asked pointedly.

"Somebody comin'" thought Pearl. She knew that Fred Lee had seen her at church. Besides she had heard more than once in town earlier that somebody was coming home.

Willis Neal was coming home.

The key witness to his acquittal had been Miss Taffie Goodman, the owner of Taffie's City Cafe where the killing had taken place.

"Why I's standin' back in the kitchen fryin' Lester Bailey a egg for a egg sandwich—you know the store Lester always set in egg sandwiches, an'..."

"What about Mister Neal, Miss Goodman?" the lawyer asked.

"I'm comin' to it!" Taffie loved to dramatize her part.

"Go on."

"Like I said, I's cookin' Lester Bailey a egg, 'cause I know'd I couldn't trust my girl, Elviry there, to cook it right. You probly remember how Lester had to have his egg jist right, with the yellor runnin' an' all, so I fried it myself. I remember the time Lester throwed a sanwich at my waitress 'cause the yellor wasn't right, so I..."

"What about Willis Neal?"

"Well I jist tell you, I's standin' there with that egg almost done when I first heard 'em out in the alley behind the cafe. We had a big

*continued*

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crowd up front, folks I hadn't seen since winter, an' at first I thought they was funnin' my waitress or somethin'."

"Willis, Miss Taffie, Willis!"

Taffie had to be continually prompted, but when she did finally get to her testimony, she told it well.

"They was clear out back. Willis and Babe an' that Herman Griffin feller. I moved over to the door, but they's jist out a sight where I couldn't see 'em, but I could hear 'em alright. Yessiree, I heard it all!"

"You in love with him?" Willis asked. She didn't answer, so he must a guessed the answer 'cause the next thang I heard was him askin' her, 'You love me?' She still didn't answer, but I could hear her cryin' real soft like, like somebody died an' she jist found out."

"You still love me?" he asked again, this time a whole lot louder."

"Seemed like a long silence then, but now I know it wasn't long a'tall. She finally spoke back."

"It wern't my fault," she said, so low that even close as I was I barely heard it. She started talkin' then, git-tin' louder as she went. 'Least it

weren't all my fault. Oh Willis, when you left thangs jist got worse an' worse, what with Mama an' all, an' then you didn't come home, an' I thought he was kind at first. I didn't mean to...I mean, I guess thangs jist sorta got outa hand 'fore I knowed it. I...."

"You still love me?" he repeated."

"Yes," she said. Jist that simple, nuthin' more. Jist 'yes', with her voice real little again."

"They was a death's silence then. Quiet as a church house on Tuesday night, an' that was when I stepped out to see if I could help that poor girl, not knowin' what that Herman Griffin was gonna do an' all. I grabbed a butcher knife an' stepped out right between 'em. You shoulda saw what I saw! That girl, Babe, was leanin' against the wall with her back to 'em cryin'. Cryin' but not makin' a sound, like her voice was all out a her. I never will forget, that old Tom Cat a Miss Dora Hank's was over by the trash bucket, all scrunched down, scared like. You know cats can someway sense when thangs ain't right with folks. That old cat was always huntin' mice out

back there an'...."

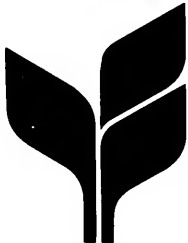
"What were Mister Neal an' Mister Griffin doin'?"

"I stepped right between 'em, facin' that Griffin man, an' you know, bein' afraid he's gonna hurt that girl, I went to talkin' fast as I could. I told him not to be mad at that girl, 'cause she didn't mean no harm, an' he wouldn't want her noway, seein' as how she still loved Willis."

"A funny thang happened then. Herman started whistlin' real low an' sad, you know how some folks can do without puckerin', jist blowin' through his bottom teeth with his teeth clenched an' his mouth open jist a little. My first husband done that while he's workin' all the time. Anyway, funny thang was, what with his teeth set the way they was, that Griffin feller looked like he was smilin', but when I looked up at them terrible eyes of his I knowed he wasn't. Nosiree, he wasn't smilin' a'tall, not with them terrible eyes! When I seen them eyes I knowed some other thangs too: I knowed that was a powerful mean man, an' I

*continued*

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knowned they was gonna be trouble  
right then!

"Anyway, he jist stepped by me  
like I hadn't never been there. He  
grabbed my butcher knife an' head-  
ed straight for Willis with it drawn  
back. They commenced to wrastle  
like, an' Willis pushed him back.  
That's when he fell down on that  
knife. Willis knowed he was hurt  
bad, jist like I knowed it, so he took  
off runnin' down the alley.

"Course ya'll know the rest. I  
take'n that girl inside an' made her  
sit by the stove 'till the crowd thin-  
ned out. I knowed we had a good  
crowd so I tried to git her to peel  
some 'taters, you know to git her  
mind of'n troubles an' all, but..."

"That'll be all Miss Taffie. You can  
step down."

Willis Neal was a free man.

It was the hottest day of the  
spring. Dora and Pearl had been on  
the front porch since before  
mid-morning.

Willis Neal appeared, walking  
down the street from the direction of  
the river. In his left hand he casually  
swung his fishing pole; the other  
hand hefted a full stringer of Blue  
Gills. Ole Tom trotted a few paces  
behind, trailing the fish that hung  
almost all the way to the street. The  
cat was obviously thinner than he  
had been when he had left home.  
Pearl noticed that a few patches of  
hair were missing from his back.

"He finally comin' home!" Pearl  
thought.

"Mornin' Miss Dora. Mornin'  
Pearl," Willis said as he stepped into  
the yard. "Got more fish here than  
me an' the Babe can eat. Thought  
ya'll might like to have a good  
mess."

"That sure would be fine, Mister  
Neal," Dora answered.

Pearl had heard about the fight  
between Fred Lee and "Pea" down  
at Lillie's Cafe. "Maybe I'll save out a  
few lil' fallahs for when my man  
come," she thought.

Pearl smiled. It was a beautiful  
spring day in Marks.

*Pete Sones graduated from Delta  
State University with a B.S.E. He  
presently makes his home in  
Pascagoula, MS*



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*continued from page 10*

Stories continue to circulate concerning the legendary Leflore. One of the most delightful concerns the payment requested by James Harris the architect upon the completion of Malmaison. He asked for and received as his fee, Rebecca, the daughter of Leflore. In honor of their marriage, Leflore selected a small holly tree to adorn the center of the massive dining table. Immediately after supper on the day of the wedding, December 27, 1855, the master of the house came forward, and with the help of the servants, by the light of the moon and torches, he planted the little holly tree on the front lawn, and yes, today on the front lawn at Malmaison is a massive old holly tree.

The silence today at Malmaison is awesome. One hears only the mournful sounds of the wind, lost among the tree tops, and the occasional rasping of a crow as it passes in flight.

The hunter or the rare Sunday afternoon explorer are the only visitors at Malmaison. They find little, save a few broken, blackened brick, beneath the dense undergrowth of briars and vines; the uprooted remains of massive concrete steps leading up and into nothingness; two deep dark cisterns surrounded by intricately laid patterns of brick; and jonquils that bravely bloom each spring beneath the majestic Spanish daggers, poised ever on guard.

A short distance from the house site is the Leflore family burial grounds. Here are found the markers of Leflore and many members of his family.

Only these few tangible objects substantiate the fact that once a man, known as Greenwood Leflore, walked these grounds; dreamed his dreams; knew his defeats; gazed up at the blue sky; felt the warmth of the sun on his back; and saw his beloved Malmaison bathed in moonlight.

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*Cherrie H. Sanders is a housewife and mother of three children. She graduated from Centenary College with a B. S.*

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*continued from page 15*

At this moment, in minced Miss Emma. Not only was she wearing "the dress," she had bedecked it and her hair with branches of crepe myrtle. The whole effect resembled some sort of weird camouflage, and I thought I saw a look of apprehension appear in the singer's eyes. Gathering up his composure, however, he began the concert.

With the first earsplitting notes, Hattie Lee and Vernell clutched each other and inched nearer the door. Lucy put out a hand, ready to grab me in case I made a move in the same direction. Miss Emma, on the other hand, appeared enraptured and sat with her eyes blissfully closed.

After about the third aria, Lucy began to sway and nod drowsily, as her head sank into her ample chest. In an effort to overcome boredom, I removed the rubber band from the end of one of my pigtails and started absentmindedly playing with it. On and on sang the opera singer, and I began twisting the rubber band into all sorts of shapes. Then, to my great

horror, the band snapped from my fingers and flew straight out to hit the back of Miss Emma's neck.

Miss Emma shot up from her chair, and screamed several octaves higher than Mr. Opera Singer. Hattie Lee and Vernell, who felt their lives were indeed threatened, almost knocked each other down getting out the door. Lucy, awakening to find "that crazy ole' lady" screaming, grabbed my arm and flung me behind her in one grand moment of fierce protection.

Mamaw sat stupefied as Miss Emma screamed something about her dear, dead husband giving her a signal from the grave. By now, our opera singer had seen enough to convince him that he was in the wrong place. He bolted from the room and ran down the hall. We heard the guest room door close with a bang, and the lock click into place.

To everyone's relief, Miss Emma began to calm down. I spotted the rubber band lying near her chair, and silently prayed that no one

would notice it, and connect it with Miss Emma's "signal" from the departed.

Later, when the house had returned to normal, I heard Mamaw knock nervously on Mr. Opera Singer's door and explain that sometimes Miss Emma was given to harmless attacks of nerves. I took this opportunity to sneak back into the living room and retrieve the cause of the whole mix-up.

After this experience, it took years before I learned to appreciate opera. And even today, when I hear an aria from "Carmen," I think of "Rice" Stevens, and wonder if Mr. Opera Singer ever told her about that afternoon in Mississippi. It must have been one of the strangest performances ever given in the world of opera.

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*Delores Scales graduated from St. Petersburg Junior College and received her B.S. degree from University of Tampa. She makes her home in St. Petersburg, Florida.*

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# Book Review

The American publishing industry has abandoned novellas. If you don't believe me, just write one. Your agent will snort with glee and make caustic remarks about keeping up with industry trends.

Then what on earth is "Lives of the Saints"?

The much ballyhooed first novel by Southerner Nancy Lemann is 143 slim pages, many of which consist of whole passages repeated throughout the book. Maybe Lemann is operating on the theory that if it was funny the first time, it'll be a scream the fifth time you read it.

I'm more inclined to believe that "Lives of the Saints" is a wonderful short story which unfortunately acquired a thyroid condition en route to publication. Of course, it can't be a novella because nobody publishes those anymore.

"Lives of the Saints" (Alfred A Knopf, New York, \$13.95) is both overblown and underdone. The narrator, Louise Brown, has come home to New Orleans after graduating from college in Boston. The story—in the tradition of Southern novels—is less about what happened than the people to whom it happened. The plot is born of locale. New Orleans anesthetizes the characters who are dazed with heat and the perpetual flow of alcohol and the smell of tropical flowers. Determinedly Southerners, they are gentle, courtly, eccentric, funny, charmingly hopeless and prone to Having A Breakdown.

The novel opens at a wild wedding reception where the bride is "the type of girl you see being dragged screaming from a convertible sports car outside of the bar at the Lafayette Hotel at three in the morning by her father and brothers, and then, the next day, in the bank or shoe store looking as though she had been shedding a lot of tears." The bride's mother and grandmother spend the entire time talking about what shoes and hats they wore when they were 15. They are joined by an

aging belle fixated upon her Countess Offers and a middle-aged man with a penchant for reciting Greek poetry and highlights of the Byzantine Empire. (If you do not know people like this in real life, you are clearly new to the Mississippi Delta.)

Louise is smitten with love for the hapless Claude Collier, that appealing kind of Southern male who typically resides at the corner of Indulgence and Religion. Like all Lemann's characters, Claude is extreme. He is stuck in one mode of behavior, his life built around one charming detail. Unfortunately, the reader craves more.

Elusive and constantly drunk, Claude arouses maternal tenderness. "His effect on women was that total strangers in restaurants or hotel lobbies would come up to him and say, 'Excuse me, but are you all right? You look a little pale. Is something wrong? Can I get you a glass of water?'"

Claude's three-year-old brother Saint is the most interesting character in the book. He "was the type of child who is accident-prone, always falling out of trees or breaking his head open on furniture. He was often at the emergency room, where he would obliviously, drink Cokes the whole time, to satisfy his craving thirst for carbonation. Southerners need carbonation. Especially when they are growing up. Saint Collier was so accident-prone that he was quite famous for it, and when his friends came over they contracted this propensity from him and fell out of trees or sprained their limbs. Frenzied mothers often went to the emergency room from the Collier's house with a small, bloody hilarious child in the back seat of a car swilling Cokes."

The book is a delight if you suspend all standard expectations of a novel. The author's inclination toward repetition is wearying, although other critics across the

country are finding it "lyrical." I thought it tedious and a misuse of talent. The first time Lemann described the "rain slashing through the azaleas," I admired her turn of phrase. The fourth time she used the exact same words, I was irked at the waste.

Some reviewers are put off by Lemann's use of capitalization. Everyone is Having a Breakdown, Bringing Order From Chaos, or Enjoying Their Wastrel Youth. I found the technique an obvious flag to the author's intention to achieve a tone of poetic modernism. It reflected the theme of the book — the crisis of youth and aimlessness. Once you realized that everyone is seeking a Refuge Against the World, the capitals are merely playful whimsy.

"Lives of the Saints" does contain good writing. There is a quality of youthful exuberance appropriate to what little plot the book offers. (I know, I know. Modern literature does not specialize in plot. I miss it, nonetheless.) Unfortunately, there are also pages which languish under the same miasma as the storyline. However, periodically a fine passage will leap off the page:

"Some men can be loyal only to ideals, which they cling to with the greatest tenacity. With a great ideal to be loyal to, their loyalty would be immense. They are too gentle, at last, to cherish something actual, something concrete."

The author herself may offer a clue to the book's Wretched Excess. While describing Louise Brown's effort to edit a tome called "Texas Business Law", Lemann says "the author's favorite phrase was when there was a case of negligence because someone was 'off on a frolic of his own'. Every other sentence was that phrase. Someone was always 'off on a frolic of his own'."

That's exactly the problem with "Lives of the Saints".

---

*Rebecca Hood-Adams received her Master's degree in English from Delta State University and her B.A. in journalism from Memphis State University. Ms. Hood-Adams has had several articles published including her collection of verse, Biscuit Soprin' Blues.*

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continued from page 19

NAJA also has fund-raisers to provide the means for carrying out their projects. In keeping with NAJA policy, each chapter chooses its own methods of raising money. Bike-a-thons, charity balls, and cook books are just a few of the ideas employed for making money. In 1985, the thirty-five NAJA chapters in Mississippi alone gave \$746,714.00 to fulfill needs in member communities. The money earned by the individual chapters is also used for the National Scholarship Project. Graduate students can receive grants-in-aid from NAJA with the provision that each recipient return to work for one year after completing his education in a state where there is a Junior Auxiliary chapter.

According to Norma DeLong, director of the National Association of Junior Auxiliaries, emphasis is currently placed on problems of the modern family. Wife and child abuse, peer pressure, and drug use are the subjects of puppet shows, plays, and films presented to young

people. One chapter has written an original drama about "latch-key kids" which is presented by many of the chapters to emphasize the importance of safety and self-dependence to children who come home by themselves to an empty house. It is no longer unusual for a child to belong to a single-parent family or a family where both parents work. The NAJA chapters try to keep abreast of modern trends and to deal with current social problems. In keeping with this goal, many of the chapters are now structured to incorporate career women into the group. Often they meet at night or schedule their main projects during times when working women have more freedom to participate. In return, working members feel satisfaction at having specific skills to offer. These women are very dedicated volunteers who must serve a minimum of 72 hours a year in order to remain members.

Each year representatives from each of the chapters attend the Annual Convention. Series of

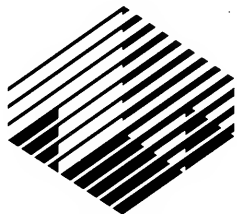
workshops, speakers, and special programs bring to these delegates an awareness of new social issues and problems being faced by families today. Ideas for educating the public about these problems and possible solutions are offered. Local chapter members return home eager to share with associates new plans and ideas for service projects.

Deltans are proud to claim Greenville as the birthplace of the National Association of Junior Auxiliaries. In 1978, the permanent NAJA headquarters was established in Greenville. This office serves as a resource center for all NAJA chapters. Films, play scripts, project plans, and other vital information can be shared by all the member chapters here. Through a balance of pooling knowledge and resources with careful attention to the needs of each local community, NAJA manages to contribute financial, educational, and cultural support to a four-state area.

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*Bonnie Horton is an English instructor at Delta State University.*

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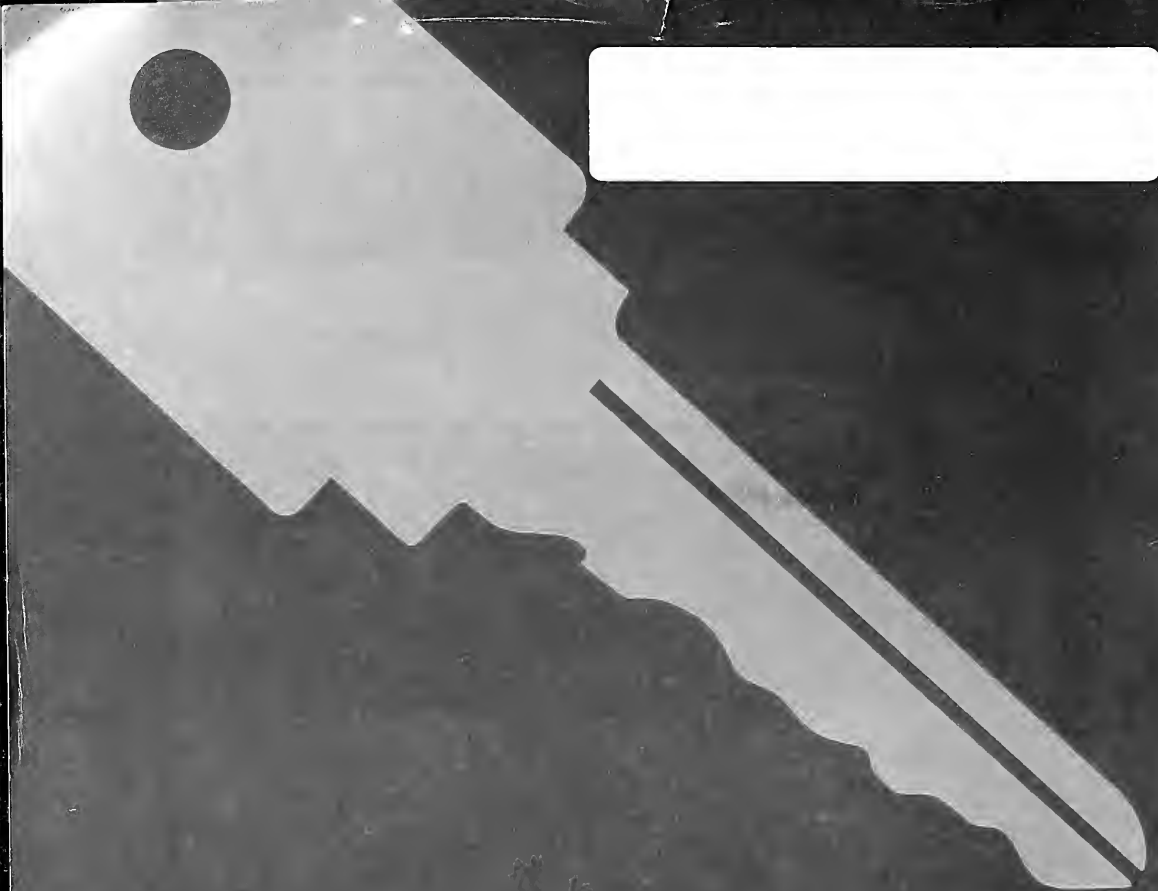
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